

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH BRIGADIER GENERAL KEVIN BERGNER, DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR STRATEGIC EFFECTS FOR MULTINATIONAL FORCE-IRAQ; REAR ADMIRAL GREG SMITH, CHIEF, PUBLIC AFFAIRS, COMMUNICATION DIVISION, STRATEGIC EFFECTS, MULTINATIONAL FORCE-IRAQ VIA CONFERENCE CALL FROM BAGHDAD, IRAQ TIME: 10:25 A.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2007

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Q Say, Jack, what's this thing you just said to us?

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): Okay. These are the slides that General Bergner had had in his briefing this morning. I wish I could have gotten them to you earlier, but I just now got them, so --

Q And what is this on?

MR. HOLT: It is -- the things he's going to speaking about, the battle update. I haven't -- there are -- I'm going to go back and look, because I've just been sending them out, and I just hadn't had a chance to really look at what -- (chuckles) -- exactly what it was.

Let's see here. Okay. These -- the 300 sheikhs (P7 ?) are some of those who have formed the concerned citizen groups, and, you know, they're taking the lead in their local communities, and that's one of the things he's going to speaking about. We've heard that from others, but it's an important --

Q Is this in a particular area or --

MR. HOLT: I -- yeah, I'm not sure exactly -- we can find out from the general when he comes in. I'm not real sure.

Q Okay. Didn't mean to get ahead of us.

MR. HOLT: Yeah. And who just joined us now?

GEN. BERGNER: Hello, everybody. This is Kevin Bergner. I'm calling in from Baghdad, Iraq.

MR. HOLT: Well, sir. Welcome to the bloggers roundtable this morning. And --

GEN. BERGNER: And --

MR. HOLT: -- glad you could join us again this morning.

GEN. BERGNER: And I'm sorry. Who am I talking to?

MR. HOLT: Okay. I'm Jack Holt with OSD PA.

GEN. BERGNER: Hi, Jack. How are you?

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. And on the line with us, we've got Richard Fernandez with The Belmont Club, Andrew Lubin with ON Point, Christian Lowe with military.com, Spencer Ackerman with the Talking Points Memo, Charlie Quidnunc with the Wizbang Podcast. And I think that's all we've got on the line right now this morning, maybe a couple others joining us as we get going but -- and --

GEN. BERGNER: Okay.

MR. HOLT: Well, sounds like somebody just joined us here. Who's on the line now? (Pause.) Okay.

Well, all right, General. General Bergner is with us. He -- (audio break) -- the bloggers roundtable this morning, and, sir, the floor is yours.

GEN. BERGNER: Okay. I think I've also got Rear Admiral Greg Smith on the line there. Greg, are you on the phone now? ADM. SMITH: I sure am.

GEN. BERGNER: Okay, great. I wanted to introduce Greg Smith to everybody. He has just joined us as the head of our Strategic Communications Division. He is coming to us from having just recently been the chief of Naval Operations' chief of Information, so he is a -- well-practiced and expert in the communications side of this, and we're really, really thankful to have him over here.

Just a couple of remarks up front. And first I'd just like to say that we did a press conference this afternoon. I was joined by Major General Doug Stone, who is the commander of our coalition task force here who oversees the detention operations throughout Iraq. And he talked in some detail about both the transparency and accountability that characterize what we're doing on the detainee side of our operations, and he also talked in some detail about the nature of care and the standards associated with that, the educational focus that he has brought to the detention effort and the level of preparation that he now has under way to help reintegrate Iraqi citizens who are currently in our custody to give them the best prospects of returning to Iraqi society and playing a productive role. And so that should be posted on our website, and it should be available on The Pentagon Channel, where we generally are videotaped and we're able to run on there. It's worth listening to.

The other couple of points that would make up front -- we talked about the nature of concerned local citizens groups here. These are Iraqi volunteers who are stepping forward at the local level in different villages and different cities. They are most importantly taking a stand to fight the extremists and take a direct role in improving security in their communities. It's what we had seen in Anbar as an important catalyst that the sheikhs of Anbar helped orchestrate, and now it's a continuing enabler that we see evolving much more broadly across Iraq.

We have also seen al Qaeda in the last week or so pursue an increase in violence, and -- not inconsistent with what we have seen from them in past periods of Ramadan.

Interestingly, they have seemed to focus on those individuals who have started to oppose them. And so we saw attacks against concerned local citizens, we have seen attacks against the Iraqi security forces, and we saw some attacks against both clerics and other government leaders as well.

Even with that, we continue to see an overall improvement this year, relative to last year, during the Ramadan period. And -- but I would say also this continues to be a tough fight. And so the progress that our forces are making as they continue operations in the Diyala River Valley, they continue operations in north central Iraq, in -- as well as the operations south of Baghdad and in the city itself, are helping to keep the pressure on al Qaeda and create a condition such that it's very difficult for them to have the freedom of maneuver, the access that they otherwise would have had and the capability to coordinate themselves before we have disrupted their leadership.

During the month of September, a result of coalition and Iraqi security operations resulted in some 29 senior members of the al Qaeda network being either captured or killed. And we covered some of that in our press conference last week and provided a summary, which should be available on our website as well, of who those individuals are.

And we also talked last week about a significant operation in northwestern Iraq near the town of Sinjar, where coalition forces on the 11th of September went in to conduct an operation against a foreign terrorist facilitation cell that had been active along the Syrian and Iraqi border -- in this case, against a target designated as Muthanna.

In the process of that operation, our forces encountered an individual with a suicide vest, who detonated it, killing himself and one other, and our forces then, in the process of taking defensive actions, killed the rest of the seven-man cell that was conducting operations there.

And one of the things that is significant about this, besides disrupting the foreign terrorist facilitation cell, is the document exploitation that has followed, literally terabytes of electronic files, some 800 names of al Qaeda terrorists, some 143 lists -- or names of al Qaeda terrorists who were either en route or had perhaps already been delivered to Iraq. And that included things like not only their normal biographical information -- name, where they're from, addresses and phone numbers, passport information -- but in many cases also included things like their transit routes and their other coordinating activities that were involved in getting them here.

We found documents that highlighted their logistical and administrative activities. We saw how they spend their money on everything from food, fuel and weapons to cell phone cards, provision of sheep, and even an allocation of money to support some of their families. And we also saw specific examples of the suicide pledge that some of these terrorists are completing and al Qaeda is using to help lead these individuals towards the performance of a suicide mission.

So we're doing just what you would expect us to do with that information. We are exploiting it, we have been exploiting it, and it's a very important insight into the nature not just of the flow of al Qaeda terrorists to Iraq, but also insights into their operations in other countries that are supporting operations there and here.

That's a quick overview and summary, and let me just ask Greg Smith if he has anything else that I left out that he wants to highlight.

ADM. SMITH: No, sir, that's good coverage. Thank you.

GEN. BERGNER: And with that, then, I would be glad to take your questions.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much, sir.

And Richard Fernandez, you were first on the line, so why don't you get us started.

Q Sure. General Bergner, someone once characterized this movement as being everywhere different, but somehow or the other the same in some way. Now, can you see some kind of end point to this? How is this all going to play out, and how is this going to reenter the mainstream of Iraqi politics?

GEN. BERGNER: Yeah, I'm sorry, I did not hear the very beginning of your question or comment. Q There was an observation that these citizens' volunteer movement that's sort of springing up everywhere are everywhere different, but somehow they're everywhere the same in some sense. And I was just asking if you could foresee how this would all workout, and how it would reenter the mainstream of Iraqi politics.

GEN. BERGNER: Right. That's a great question.

Let me start with this. Most importantly here, these groups have one thing in common, and that is they have taken the -- they have found the courage to take a stand and begin fighting against the extremists. They are doing it at the local level. They are doing it in a way that their communities are becoming part of the solution to a very difficult security problem. That's the most important element of this, is the Iraqi people taking a stand against in particular al Qaeda, but other extremists as well and with the specific purpose of trying to improve the conditions for their families and themselves.

They're doing this generally with the support of the local tribal sheikhs, the tribal leadership in these communities.

And they are doing it under the auspices of both the coalition forces, their own security forces and the government of Iraq.

And the purpose here is to help these folks take that step and become a significant factor in improving the security situation, but not outside the bounds of their own government. So as they take these steps, as they demonstrate the courage to fight Iraq -- fight the extremists in Iraq, at the same time, the government of Iraq, the Iraqi security forces and the coalition are helping screen them, vet them. And for those who want to seek service in the Iraqi security forces, the government of Iraq has a path for that to be pursued.

We have seen some 1,700 of these volunteers west of Baghdad in the Abu Ghraib district be accepted into their security forces there. They've actually completed the police training, and they're on duty. And you see that in other areas of Baghdad now as they are -- as others are matriculating through their -- into their legitimate security forces.

The other thing that you see is that they very rapidly get organized and tucked in with or under the responsibility of either the Iraqi police or the Iraqi army, so they are not an extra-governmental security apparatus, but that they are tied closely to those. And the prime minister has issued guidance to his Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior leadership with explicit parameters to telling subordinate forces to work with these groups. And so there's very much a government of Iraq effort to expand their interaction and their -- and the accountability of these groups to the established security forces of Iraq.

And so the path -- that's kind of a long prelude, but the path that you are looking for in terms of where does this go -- this basically brings people who were formerly fighting against the government of Iraq or against the security forces or the coalition, and it gives them a path to either matriculate into the legitimate security forces of Iraq or pursue employment opportunities or other ways to become part of the solution in their communities.

And that's how this will logically play out. The government of Iraq takes ownership, and in some cases these will be policemen, in some cases they'll be army soldiers, in other cases they might be -- they might find themselves transitioning to work on infrastructure projects and contribute in some other way. So that's how this goes, and it's -- I think it's also important, as we talk -- have this conversation about this, to point out that this is a transition. And it's important to understand that the nature of a transition is one that has a lot of complexity. There will be a very natural friction along the way as the different groups try to figure out how to build confidence with each other, trust- building, and how to be transparent in what they're actually involved in.

And so as you hear about those kinds of things, the point that I would make is, those are natural. And there are things that need to be worked through, but they are part of a natural process of helping this transition take place.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Andrew Lubin?

Q General, Andrew Lubin from ON Point. How are you, sir?

GEN. BERGNER: Hi, Andrew. It's good to talk with you. I'm well.

Q Good. And Admiral, welcome to the group.

Hope you'll be on with us a lot of times.

ADM. SMITH: I will. Thank you.

Q Great. Thank you.

General, it was reported, starting Monday and a lot the last couple days, that the GOI is pulling back from reconciliation. Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, who's a Kurd, is saying that reconciliation isn't going to happen.

And also on Monday, Brigadier General Joseph Anderson basically said it's perceived by the government that reconciliation is a winner for the Sunnis and not a winner for the Shi'as. Are we approaching a tipping point in the war

and in Iraq, where either the citizens are going to take over and run the country -- because obviously the surge on the ground is doing a great job -- or the GOI is going to -- or they have to finally roger up and act as a real government? Are we approaching that point, do you think?

GEN. BERGNER: Well, I think one of the key things I would say in regard to that discussion is, a lot of those comments may be more about the semantics and the word choice than they are the actual strategic direction and the strategic goals that are in play here.

And you know, what I think they are consistently getting at is, as people make the kinds of choices we just talked about, about stepping up and helping -- become part of the security solution, for example -- they also need to see some tangible improvement in their life. They need to see the provision of services. They need to see that their commitment is going to result in a better situation for them and their families. And to the degree that that encourages their commitment to reconciliation or that that further facilitates the accommodations that need to be made, then certainly, you know, the -- you know, essential services and the kind of lives Iraqi citizens are able to lead definitely matter to the way ahead.

And so, you know, I think what Barham Salih was getting at is that's an important component to the future direction of Iraq, and it's one that certainly everybody agrees is important.

In terms of, you know, how this is going and where it's going to go, I guess I would come back to the point that this is a period that requires confidence-building measures. And these local groups and their ability to work together and to work with Iraqi security forces and to work with their government provide an important confidence-building measure to the bigger issue of reconciliation. In many cases, they're an enabler for that kind of trust-building to take place.

And so -- and in some cases there are going to be those who intervene and -- perhaps for political purposes or some other purpose -- may try to subjugate that to another agenda.

And so you have to work through those things and you have to help bring it back to ultimately this is about Iraq and helping Iraqis find some common ground and work together for the purposes of both reconciliation and the bigger agenda of Iraq becoming responsible for its own security and stability.

So that's not an unnatural set of discussions and comments, and they're going to take place as people sort out what's the most important aspect of this now and where do we go from here.

Q If I could follow up, is the government of Iraq actually helping in the Shi'a areas? I mean, we were talking with Lieutenant Colonel Adjie two weeks ago and Colonel Mike Kershaw last week, and they're, to put it politely, less than impressed with the government of Iraq interaction. If the people in Baghdad are not even helping their fellow Shi'as, how does -- it seems that the locals, the concerned citizen groups, the Sons of Anbar, are going to end up doing it on their own -- yeah, hopefully with our help -- and then we're really no better off because we don't have -- they don't have a federal government that helps them out.

GEN. BERGNER: Well -- yeah. Well, it's important to note too -- and this is a situation where there is no "one size fits all" solution. And if you go back to Anbar as a start point, that's a pretty homogenous population. The Sunni tribal leaders there certainly have some divergent agendas at times, but they have a lot of commonality. And so there's a -- there's an approach that works there and that was appropriate for them given the nature of the population there.

When you go to Diyala and you have a more mixed population, you're going to have situations that are more complex and you're going to have a mixture of both sectarian concerns that have to be addressed and you're going to have some political issues that are clearly associated with those different sectarian views.

In this case I would just point to Mahmudiyah, and an area where concerned local citizens have earned the trust of the local people. Both Sunni and Shi'a are now gaining enough confidence to move back into their homes. And so residents across sectarian lines are finding these individuals trustworthy, and when they're working with the Iraqi security forces and the coalition, it's an enabler. It's helping in that respect. If you go to south of Baghdad and you look at some of the places there where Mike Kershaw's forces have been operating, you'll see that there are -- if you look at Iskandariyah and Musayyib, for example, you'll see Shi'a concerned local citizens and you'll see Sunni concerned local citizens, in the hundreds in terms of their numbers.

And they're getting organized. They're sorting out their goals and their objectives, and the government of Iraq is trying to reach out to them, is trying to work with them at the same time that they're working with the Ghazalia volunteers and the Amiriyah volunteers and a number of other groups in Baghdad.

Iraqi -- I was in West Rashid the other day in the Saidiyah neighborhood, and I stood on a corner there talking to a(n) Iraqi security volunteer who happened to be Sunni, very well presented, a very credible security capability that he represented. On the other side of the street was a national police officer in his blue camouflage uniform who was helping coordinate traffic and was working actually with this Iraqi security volunteer in a pretty effective way. And so you do see gives and takes; you do see the normal transitional challenges that this is going to involve. And we need to take a little bit of a long view and know that there will be challenges along the way.

But most importantly, we've got to keep encouraging local solutions to local security challenges; courage on the part of the local people to step up and work together and with their security forces; encourage on the part of the part of the Iraqi government to continue reaching out to these groups and building those -- building the confidence and the trust that's necessary for these accommodations to lead to the broader reconciliation opportunities that need to be addressed as well.

So a long answer to you, but I think it's important to understand that as you get to the mixed neighborhoods and as you get to some of these areas and as you get to a level where there are more and more of these groups, it's a challenge for the government of Iraq, and so they're working on their own capacity to administer these groups and to make the necessary decisions at the central government level, even as these groups grow both in number and even as they expand in terms of their geographic distance from Baghdad.

Q Great. Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: And Christian Lowe.

Q Hi, General Bergner. This is Christian Lowe from Military.com. A quick question along the same lines of what you were talking about with Andrew. You know, we saw this initiative starting in Anbar a couple years ago, and I'm wondering -- and you mentioned how sort of homogenous the population is there, and there's one way to initiate this reconciliation there and another in these other areas of Iraq.

To what do you attribute that? What changed in the U.S. pitch? What was it that gave these tribes and these locals enough confidence to band together and start going after al Qaeda and other insurgents?

GEN./ADM. : Well, I think one of the most important things was not so much about the United States as much as it was about the Iraqi people and al Qaeda. And as the Iraqi people saw more clearly the nature of this enemy, they saw that this was an enemy that was seeking to establish a Taliban-like state, that was absolutely intolerant of any activity outside their Taliban-like rule. The Iraqi people, the tribal leaders, have started to make their own calculations based on that, and they have said this is not what Iraq is about, this is not what we're about as Iraqi citizens.

They saw their communities victimized by these -- by al Qaeda. And I could point to places not only in Anbar, where there was torture, and essential services and other things were held hostage, but you could see the same thing in Diyala, as our operations there this summer liberated what had become torture houses. We liberated hostages. They realized that the public distribution system had been taken -- had been hijacked by al Qaeda.

And so I think Iraqi people have made that calculation more than there's something on the part of coalition forces that led to that calculation. And that's what you see in other neighborhoods as well. Once the Iraqi people get a sense that they can help change the circumstance they've been exposed to, more and more have seen what can be accomplished at the local level if they step forward and work together and with their security forces. So I think it's more about an Iraqi calculation, I think, is my bottom line.

Q So you're saying that really coalition forces had no role in that switch?

GEN./ADM. : Absolutely -- I'm absolutely not saying that. I'm saying coalition forces were important in encouraging them, important in helping them get organized and helping them deal with the initial steps that need to be taken for them to start opposing al Qaeda. So coalition forces have been and continue to be very important enablers to that.

But without that calculation on the part of the Iraqi people, it's kind of hard to get it started. And so I think you really do have to give credit to the Iraqi citizens and to their courage in stepping forward. And no question, though, the coalition is enabling that and is very much a factor in helping accelerate it.

Q Okay, thanks. GEN./ADM. : You bet.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Spencer.

Q Hi, General Bergner and Admiral Smith. Thanks so much for joining us. Along the same lines as everyone else's questions, I wanted to ask about some of the steps in this transition. You're surely familiar with the criticism that the concerned local citizens groups represent basically U.S.-backed or -encouraged militias that might, after some period of U.S. retrenchment or even withdrawal, go after the Iraqi central government.

I want to ask some questions along those lines.

First, when they take actions independent or with the coalition in the background and with the ISF in the background or supporting, how do you know that who they target are truly terrorists and extremists? What's the kind of oversight process over that? Have concerned local citizens groups in some of the mixed areas you've talked about, like Diyala or Iskandariyah, ever fought with one another or with the Iraqi security forces?

And finally, you mentioned how the government of Iraq has certain processes to get some of the CLCs, if they decide to, into the Iraqi security forces or local jobs in those cities. Has money actually come through or is this still kind of the process of sorting out guidelines in anticipation of something actually happening in that regard?

GEN. BERGNER: Wow. That was a lot of questions. Let me kind of work my way through this and I think I can hit them all as I go.

First of all, understand that the government of Iraq -- the prime minister has taken a pretty courageous stand here in supporting and encouraging Iraqi citizens to come forward and to oppose al Qaeda, oppose other extremist groups and to help find ways for them to work with their own security forces. This will take time and it will also take increasing amounts of confidence-building measures as it goes forward.

So -- but this is being done in concert with the government of Iraq, and they are out meeting these groups. In fact, they were in Saidiyah in the last several days. They have been down south to Latifiyah and Iskandariyah, in that area. They have visited Diyala and met with the Diyala support group and groups up there, as well. The prime minister has met with the Salahuddin tribal council and concerned citizens there. And so there actually is a significant amount of outreach under way, and it is across sectarian lines.

So the government of Iraq is very much a part of it. They're involved directly and they are continuing to take on the tough questions that we've talked about in this conversation already.

How does it play out? Well, the most important way is for these groups to be assimilated into the Iraqi security forces and/or be provided other meaningful employment and ways to contribute to their country. And that's what the government of Iraq and their security forces and the coalition are collaboratively trying to help take place.

There aren't any simple solutions. And as I mentioned earlier, there isn't a single solution that applies uniformly to everybody. It depends on the community, it depends on the need for police in that community, it depends on the tribal commitments and the level of interaction there with the central government, and all of those are being worked by different interlocutors and different champions within the government of Iraq.

So it's a work in progress, but I would say most importantly, it's in progress. And there will be challenges, there will be setbacks along the way, and I think the important point is to keep everybody's eye on the most important facet of this, which is, these are people who are helping make a difference at the local level with security in a way that only a local citizen in many cases can have the same kind of effect.

Q Can I follow on on that? Because you didn't actually answer my questions. I mean first, have they -- have there ever been, to your knowledge, concerned local citizens fighting one another? What kind of oversight exists to make sure that the people the CLCs target are in fact terrorists and extremists?

GEN. BERGNER: Okay, just -- if you hold on just a minute. I'm not a tactical ground commander, so I'm not a guy that can give you the insights that Mike Kershaw could about exactly how this plays out on the ground. But my sense is they are working well with the security forces in their area, and they are being accountable for their actions. And the coalition commanders that I've talked to are -- have a high degree of confidence and believe there is good accountability in them.

So, that's the answer to your first question. What's your second one?

Q Have there been any examples of coalition -- I'm sorry -- CLCs fighting with one another?

GEN. BERGNER: I am not aware of any. And so I would -- I can't take it on any more directly than that. But I am not aware of any specific circumstances like that. And again, when you guys do these calls that might involve tactical commanders, they'll be able to give you a better sense of the granularity there, but to my knowledge, that has not been a -- has not necessarily been a significant part of the issues that they're addressing.

I'm sorry, now go ahead, because I've -- that's why I get -- I get lost on all these -- on all the multiple questions. What was the next one? (Chuckles.)

Q And I'm sorry for taking up everyone else's time. Thank you so much for devoting this in detail. I wanted to know just finally, has money actually come through from the Iraqi government to either get people into the security forces outside of the Abu Ghraib example that you mentioned, or for something that might resemble a DDR effort to get these guys civilian jobs?

GEN. BERGNER: Yeah. They are working on other -- there are definitely others besides the 1,700 in Abu Ghraib that are being matriculated into the Iraqi security forces. And in fact, I'll ask our guys to -- if that'd be okay, I'll ask them to get you the most recent numbers of where they are going into the police and the army and give you a better sense of sort of the pace of all that.

And in terms of specific employment incentives and action by the government of Iraq, those actually are under way. And the government was recently, as you probably read, out in Anbar province. Some \$70 million in reconstruction funding, another \$50 million in housing construction, and they're working on similar packages in Diyala. In fact, I think there's a meeting either today or tomorrow that would involve the governor there as well as the

deputy prime minister to lock down exactly what the economic package will be there.

So those actually are being addressed very directly between the governors, tribal leaders and the central government.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q Thanks so much, General. I really appreciate your detailed response.

GEN. BERGNER: You're welcome, and I'm sorry that I lost your three questions. And I appreciate you bringing me back to them.

MR. HOLT: All right.

Charlie Quidnunc. Charlie, you still with us? (No audible response.) Okay. We must have lost him.

All right. We've got just --

GEN. BERGNER: Jack, I think I have time for one more question. I'm going to -- I thought we were doing about 30 minutes here, and I've got other things lining up so.

MR. HOLT: Right, sir.

Q Jack --

GEN. BERGNER: I would be glad to take one more.

Okay?

Q Jack, Mike Goldfarb. Can I get one in here?

MR. HOLT: Yes, Mike.

Q General Bergner, thanks again. I'm curious as to -- Petraeus came out again last week and sort of talked about Iranian involvement in Iraq, and I'm wondering whether you guys feel like you have all the resources you need to deal with the flow of weapons and fighters, et cetera, from Iran and Syria, and sort of whether you feel you have the resources you need to deal with those problems.

GEN. BERGNER: Well, first, I would just -- because you mentioned it, I would just point out that the remark that was made last week was really just a stipulation of fact; I mean that had been reported by the media previously. It was not a new piece of information, but -- and so I wouldn't want anybody to over-associate that comment with some other purpose or meaning. There isn't any. It was simply a statement and stipulation of fact.

In terms of how we are conducting operations against those networks here in Iraq, we are, as you have seen in some of our reporting, we are focusing on the facilitators, whether they be a Qods Force officer or a proxy, as in the case Ali Musa Daqduq, the Lebanese Hezbollah operative that we captured in March; or whether they be an Iraqi interlocutor like Qais Khazali, who used to

command the special groups, who we also captured in that same operation in March.

And so we are focused on the leadership and the facilitation components of that network. We are also conducting operations against those who are transiting weapons. We continue to find weapons of -- that appear to have been provided by Iranian sources, and we continue to conduct operations against those individuals in Iraq who are benefitting from that training, benefitting from that -- the provision of those weapons and seeking to use it for terrorist and criminal purposes. And so we have had a pretty steady flow of operations against special groups' members and others who are the recipients of that training or the weapons associated with it.

And I would point out that the operations I started off talking about concerning the foreign terrorist facilitation network on the Syrian border that we interdicted on September 11th of this year is another example of the kinds of efforts that are underway and how our resources are being used.

So our sense is within Iraq, we are having effects and we are being able to interdict and interrupt those operations, and keep the pressure on those networks.

There is a broader responsibility here too which is outside Iraq. And you have seen Prime Minister Maliki engage his neighbors. He has been to Turkey; he has been to Tehran; he has been to Damascus. He's visited Jordan and he has engaged all of his neighbors on a bilateral and a multilateral level, to ask their help in stemming the flow of unhelpful influences into Iraq.

And then you have seen other forums, like the neighbors working group, where the neighbors of Iraq plus P-5 members and gulf state members have met to address specific border security issues. And they have also met to address specific issues associated with stemming the flow of foreign terrorists. So all of those efforts are necessary for us to continue to keep having the effect that's necessary against the flow of people, weapons and funding.

Q Can I just ask a quick follow-up?

GEN. BERGNER: Sure.

Q Do you feel like things are generally moving in a positive direction in that area? Or are they pretty stable? Or are things deteriorating further?

GEN. BERGNER: Well, we have seen some progress, for example, and more progress necessary certainly. But we have seen some progress in our operations against the foreign fighter flow that has been, as you know, a central part of al Qaeda's efforts to incite sectarian violence. Foreign fighters are heavily used as suicide bombers, and suicide bombers are very important to the kind of spectacular, barbaric attacks that have been -- that have in the past fueled the sectarian violence.

And so we have seen some progress against them, and it's a combination of all the factors that I just talked about. I can't point to any one of them in particular, not the least of which I would also say is our own kinetic operations against these different cells.

You remember we killed the al-Turki brothers back in the June and July time frame, and we recently killed a man named Abu al-Tunisi, who was a foreign terrorist facilitator as well, in Muthanna, on September 11th, and the documentation exploitation that took place on the heels of that.

So we are making progress in that respect, but it requires a concerted effort and broad multilateral support to the government of Iraq.

Q That's mostly on the Syrian/Sunni side of things, though. You feel like the same progress is being made against a Iranian special groups and the flow of weapons and fighters from there?

GEN. BERGNER: Yeah, that's a more difficult one to quantify. And we certainly have welcomed the commitment that the government of Iran has made to the government of Iraq. We would like very much to point to their excellence in fulfilling those commitments. We haven't seen that yet, and that's something that we hope they actually do follow through on. And there is -- there becomes some sort of statistically significant discernible improvement.

In the meantime, we do continue to conduct the operations that are targeting the networks and the facilitators -- and most recently, Mahmoud Farhadi, a Qods Force officer detained in northern Iraq a couple weeks ago -- because that's our mandate. That's our responsibility, to take the necessary actions to improve stability and security here -- so more to follow -- more to be seen on that front.

Q Thank you very much, sir.

GEN. BERGNER: Yup.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much. And I know you're busy and got things backing up on you, but thank you so much for taking time to be with us today for the bloggers roundtable.

GEN. BERGNER: Okay, Jack. Thank you, and thanks for your good questions. I appreciate everybody's insights. We learn a lot just hearing what your issues and questions are during these discussions. So it does help us a great deal as well, and we thank you for what you're doing. So thanks a lot.

MR. HOLT: All right. Q General, thank you again. Appreciate the time.

ADM. SMITH (?): Thank you.

Q Thank you very much.

GEN. BERGNER: Bye-bye.

Q Thanks.

MR. HOLT: All right. And Major General Kevin J. Bergner, deputy chief of staff for Strategic Effects, with us today. Thanks.

ADM. SMITH (?): Thank you.

GEN. BERGNER: Thanks very much.

END.